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ABSTRACT

The variety of current University of Arizona (UA) faculty and administrative activities that can be thought of as assessment in the broadest sense of the term are reviewed, and the involvement of the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education is noted. UA is involved in assessing both programs and students in many areas in order to improve student and institutional performance. However, these varied assessments do not provide all the information the institution requires to make data-informed decisions in many arenas, so further special studies of institutional performance are necessary. Current UA assessment activities are described with focus on the following (with a look at the purposes, the nature of planning for each, the data sources, and the involvement of the Center): admissions/entry information; the entry level mathematics program; the university composition program; special academic programs; teaching evaluations; student development; department data on students; department reviews; demonstration departments; general education program evaluation; professional education; college students experiences; longitudinal study (1988-89 freshman); senior study (1988-89); and alumni survey (to link students' personal and academic experiences with the outcomes that are discernable only to a graduate). (SM)

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Report No. 4

# Center for Research on Undergraduate Education

Internal Report Series (602) 621-7723

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TITLE: SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

AUTHOR: Sarah M. Dinham, Ph.D.

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DATE: July, 1988

PRECIS: This brief report reviews the variety of current University of Arizona faculty and administrative activities that can be thought of as "assessment" in the broadest sense of term, and explains the Center's involvement in each.

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# SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

# AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Sarah M. Dinham, Ph.D., Director
July 1988

This brief report reviews the variety of current University of Arizona faculty and administrative activities that can be thought of as "assessment" in the broadest sense of term, and explains the Center's involvement in each.

## Background

As the Provost's Task Force on Assessment of the Quality and Outcomes of Undergraduate Education explained in its May 1987 report, the University is currently engaged in assessing both programs and students in many arenas. For example, department reviews and professional accreditations occur regularly, and composition and quantitative skills are assessed for all students. Because these varied assessments do not, however, provide all the information the institution requires to make data-informed decisions in many arenas, further special studies of institutional performance are required. Together, the ongoing, regular program assessments can be supplemented by studies specially focused on important, current questions to give a more complete picture of the University's demonstrable educational processes and impact.

In formulating its recommendations for the University of Arizona, the Provost's Task Force made clear that while accountability to society for educational quality is important, the more salient and far-reaching purpose is to improve student and institutional performance. This principle has shaped the University of Arizona's efforts to document the nature, quality, and outcomes of its undergraduate programs. Throughout the Task Force Report and subsequent writings, and throughout Center for Research on Undergraduate Education conversations with faculty and administrators, this theme has been emphasized.

The following paragraphs briefly describe "assessment" activities currently underway on the University of Arizona campus. The questions addressed in each, the purposes, the nature of the planning for each, the data sources, and the involvement of the Center are summarized in the Figure on the following page.

# SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES at the University of Arizona

Prepared by the
Center for Research on Undergraduate Education
July 1988

## Ongoing Assessment Efforts and Special Projects

| ADMISSIONS/ENTRY INFORMATION | MATHEMATICS PROGRAM | COMPOSITION PROGRAM | SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS | TEACHING EVALUATIONS | STUDENT DEVELOPMENT | DEPARTMENT DATA ON STUDENTS | DEPARTMENT REVIEWS | DEMONSTRATION DEPARTMENTS | EVAL. OF GENERAL ED. PROGRAM | PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION | COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES | FRESHMAN LONGITUDINAL | SENIOR STUDY | ALUMNI SURVEY | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **I. QUESTIONS** |
| * | | | | | * | | | | | | * | * | * | * | Nature of campus life |
| * | * | * | * | * | | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | Nature of academic experience |
| | * | * | * | * | | | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | Quality of educational process |
| | * | * | * | * | | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | Intellectual outcomes of education |
| | | | * | * | * | | | | | | * | * | * | * | Personal outcomes of education |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **II. PURPOSES** |
| * | * | * | | | * | | * | | * | * | * | * | * | * | Universitywide efforts/decisions |
| | | | | * | | | * | | | | | | | | Personnel decisions |
| | * | * | * | * | | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | Program/dep't/school decisions |
| | * | | | * | | | * | * | * | | | | | | Course/curriculum/instruction decisions |
| * | * | * | | | * | | | | * | * | * | * | * | * | Documentation beyond UA |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **III. PLANNING INVOLVEMENT** (excluding Center for Research...) |
| | | | | | | | | | | | * | * | * | | Students |
| | * | * | | * | | * | * | * | | | | | | | Faculty in academic units |
| * | * | * | * | * | | | | | * | | * | * | * | * | Faculty in committees |
| * | | | | | * | | | | | | | * | * | * | Student affairs |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | Graduates |
| * | * | * | * | | * | | * | * | | | | | | * | Administrators |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **IV. SOURCES OF DATA** |
| * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | | Students |
| | | | | * | | * | * | * | * | * | | | | | Faculty in academic units |
| | * | * | | | | | | | * | | | | | | Faculty in committees |
| * | | | | | * | | | * | | * | | * | * | * | Student Affairs (Res. Eval. & Test. Off.) |
| | | | | | | | * | | | * | | | | * | Graduates |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **V. CENTER INVOLVEMENT** |
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 1. No responsibility/not involved |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2. Maintain contact |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3. Consultation |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 4. Collaboration |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 5. Principal responsibility |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 6. Exclusive responsibility |

## Admissions/Entry Information

At the time students enter the University of Arizona, they provide (or have already provided) a significant body of information about themselves. The data file for each student at this time includes not only demographic information and all admissions information, but data collected at Orientation, including Astin's CIRP and other locally devised questions. The major repository for this information, and the source for Center retrieval of it, is the Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Testing Office, directed by Richard Kroc, Ph.D.

## The Entry Level Mathematics Program

The Mathematics Department's five year plan to restructure entry level mathematics was reviewed in the Spring of 1988. The "Report on the Entry Level Math Program" resulting from this review included an overview of the program (with discussions of the Math Readiness Test, the mathematics instructional environment, recent curriculum changes, outreach to high schools, and use of new technology in teaching math), comparative data and results from the evaluation of the entry level program (using pass rates in freshman math courses and grade point averages earned by students), and reflections on the planning and changes remaining as the faculty continues to work to improve the program.

The Department of Mathematics continues to monitor and report on the effectiveness of the entry level mathematics program and on its efforts to reform the teaching of undergraduate mathematics.

## The University Composition Program

Incoming freshmen's writing skills are tested using a composition placement examination; results from this examination together with information from the student's high school background are used to place them in one of three Freshman Composition courses. The Upper Division Writing Proficiency Examination is administered to all students, usually at the end of the sophomore or beginning of the junior year. Results are reported to the student and to the major department; a special writing course is available to students whose performance is deemed inadequate.

Evaluations of these efforts are underway. At present, they include such efforts as exploring links between placement test performance and high school information, and investigating the adequacy of the students' course placement based upon the placement examination.

Special Academic Programs

From time to time the University focuses special efforts on certain student groups or academic ventures. Each of these efforts either has or should develop its own assessment component. Examples of such efforts would be the following:

the Honors program
the University Teaching Center
special ventures such as the Year of the Undergraduate
the minority student recruitment/retention programs

One example of a ongoing study of a particular academic concern deserves special mention. The University's commitment to Hispanic students and their success is being carried forward through a dissertation currently in progress. The researcher has identified all those Hispanic students entering the University in 1985 for whom there are CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) questionnaire and CSEQ (College Student Environment) data, and who are entering their senior year in Fall 1988. These students are being interviewed to glean information about how Hispanic students "cope" and "survive" at a large, public research research university. The study is expected to suggest areas for in which public, research universities like Arizona can meet the special concerns of Hispanic students.

Teaching Evaluations

Faculty and teaching assistants routinely arrange for their courses and their own instructional practices to be evaluated by a variety of methods. Generally these data are collected either to provide information to or about an individual teacher (for improving teaching or for personnel decisions) or for a faculty to assess an entire course. (A recent special Provost's Committee addressed this procedure and made recommendations for the suppore, improvement, and evaluation of teaching at the University of Arizona.)

Many of these evaluations yield information that can be used, in the aggregate, as departments and colleges assess their own undergraduate programs. While data collected for individual instructional improvement and/or for individual personnel decisions are not usually useful for overall program appraisal, information collected about courses (such as linkages among required courses, or facilities and logistical arrangements for courses) can be used by departments reviewing their curricula.

## Student Development

The Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Testing Office (SARETO) provides student-related research support and many testing services (e.g. GRE, career counseling) for University of Arizona students. More importantly for the University's assessment effort, the office also conducts research on student development, ecology, retention, and testing issues, supporting the Director of the Student Resource Center and the Vice President for Student Affairs in their needs for information about the University student body. Recent studies have included mapping the progress of students transferring into the University, and studying the activities and progress of a sample of students withdrawing from the University. SARETO coordinates closely with the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education, consulting on some investigations, providing data retrieval support on others, and collaborating on many. The SARETO Director is a member of the Center's Advisory Committee.

## Department Data on Students

Through the 1987-7 academic year the Assessment Task Force and its successor, the Center, undertook to determine from all academic units on the Arizona campus the data that each department, program, and/or college holds for its undergraduate students. That survey's methods and findings are described in the Center's Internal Report #3.

In general there is great variety among departments and colleges in the nature and quantity of data they hold about their undergraduate majors. Most units record for their students very little information considering the possibilities available. While department and college faculties have apparently seen little need in the past to maintain extensive records about their students, this may change with revision of the Program Review process to encourage greater attention to undergraduate education and its outcomes.

## Department Reviews

Many departments and colleges in preparing for an Academic Program Review assemble data that can be used in examining and assessing the quality and the outcomes of their undergraduate programs. These data, and the findings they suggest, can be manifest in a variety of places throughout the Review process, from the Initial Planning stage, which may indicate special attention being placed on the undergraduate program, to the final conclusions and recommendations.

Demonstration Departments

A project of the Center, this effort will identify carefully chosen departments/colleges due for Academic Program Review before 1991. These departments will be invited to participate as "demonstration departments," to pilot-test innovative strategies for redefining and broadening the possibilities for assessing the nature, quality, and outcomes of their undergraduate programs. The demonstration departments will be strong units with effective faculty and leaders who want to rethink and strengthen their undergraduate program's documentation and accountability.

General Education Program Evaluation

The College of Arts and Sciences' General Education Program, which rests in a set of principles ratified by the Arts and Sciences faculty, consists of (1) designated courses in basic skills and proficiencies and (2) designated coursework in five study areas.

The eight-member faculty General Education Committee governing the Program is responsible for establishing "specific evaluation procedures to assess the program on an on-going basis." In the Fall of 1988 the Committee, having launched the General Education Program and presided over its initial successes and refinements, will be designing an ongoing evaluation system for monitoring the General Education program. The Committee will begin by examining the program itself, and will design methods for collecting information about the students' attainment of the Program's goals. The Center for Research on Undergraduate Education will provide consultation and staff support to the Arts and Sciences General Education Committee.

Professional Education

The vast majority of the scholarly literature on assessment in higher education, and indeed the majority of effort nationwide, concerns undergraduate education in the arts and sciences. However, because professional education is growing in its importance in higher education nationwide, and because we at Arizona have special research interests in professional education, an important component of the Center's activity focuses on professional education.

At present we are (1) examining alternative definitions of undergraduate "professional" fields, (2) analyzing similarities and differences among professional fields, (3) applying the current scholarly literature on general education (and its assessment) to professional education, (4) examining the relationship of accreditation efforts to undergraduate

assessment, and (5) aiming toward a model for assessment of undergraduate professional education programs that can be useful both at Arizona and elsewhere.

College Student Experiences

In an effort to collect a broad scope of general information about the undergraduate experience at Arizona, the Assessment Transition Team (created to bridge the May-December 1987 gap between the Assessment Task Force and the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education) collaborated with the Composition Program to design and administer a two-page informal questionnaire entitled the "College Student Experiences" survey. The questionnaire drew questions from the important areas of college experiences and outcomes summarized in Figure 1 of the Assessment Task Force Report, a list based in the current scholarly literature on college student outcomes. The survey is administered when students sign up for the Writing Proficiency Examination.

During the Spring 1988 semester, the College Student Experiences questionnaire was completed by 605 students; results from these data are summarized in the Center's Internal Report #6.

The questionnaire's admittedly general findings have been interesting to a variety of constituencies on campus. To make the survey even more useful, it is being revised during Summer, 1988. Data collected from the revised version during the 1988-1989 academic year will be reported in May, 1989.

Longitudinal Study: 1988-1989 Freshman

Because the many, scattered assessment efforts currently underway at the University of Arizona cannot provide coordinated longitudinal information beyond the simplest tracking data, the Center is instituting in 1988 a longitudinal study of undergraduates. The study is being conducted with several intentions: (1) to supplement quantitative data routinely available by computer with interview studies to understand the complexity and character of the undergraduate experience at Arizona, (2) to suggest areas for institutional and program improvements not readily discerned in separate assessment studies, and (3) to begin to link institutional environmental variables with student learning and development.

The overall plan for the Longitudinal Study is described in the Center's internal report #5.

Senior Study

A study of seniors is being undertaken in the 1988-1989 academic year to supplement the Longitudinal Study that will begin with freshmen in the Fall of 1988. This study is similar in general intentions to the Longitudinal Study: (1) to supplement quantitative data routinely available by computer with interview studies to understand the complexity and character of the undergraduate experience at Arizona, (2) to suggest areas for institutional and program improvements not readily discerned in separate assessment studies, and (3) to begin to link institutional environmental variables with student learning and development.

Unlike the Longitudinal Study's origins in the 1988 entering Freshman class, however, the Senior Study will use a research design that will permit individualization of data collection for each student in the sample -- since students will have unique histories of experiences at Arizona by the time they are studied as seniors. The Senior Study will focus specifically on the students' (a) general liberal education and (b) major fields of study, their (c) personal development through college, and their (d) plans for the future. Additionally, the Senior Study will include validation and further pursuit of the more interesting findings from the EEC Task Force's study of undergraduates. It is expected that the sample of senior students studied in 1988-1989 can be followed into their first few postgraduate years as University of Arizona alumni.

The Senior Study research plan will be described in the forthcoming Center for Research on Undergraduate Education internal report #7.

Alumni Survey

The fourth Center study (the other three being College Student Experiences, Longitudinal, and Senior Studies) represents an attempt to link students' personal and academic experiences with the outcomes that are discernable only to a graduate. Such matters as the nature of the campus environment, the most significant academic influences, and the gains perceived, or "value added," through University of Arizona study and graduation are the subjects of the Alumni Survey. Our understanding from other institutions conducting retrospective assessments aimed at program improvement is that fairly recent graduates carefully sampled and relentlessly pursued will generate the most representative and therefore useful data for University of Arizona faculty and administrators.

The Center has begun working with the Alumni office to coordinate the logistics and the research procedures for this study. Among

the purposes of the study will be further pursuit of more interesting findings from the EEC Task Force study of almuni.

The Alumni Survey will be described in the forthcoming Center for Research on Undergraduate Education internal report #10.

Report No.

# Center for Research on Undergraduate Education

Internal Report Series (602) 621-7723

REPORT #:

1 UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA: ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY AND OUTCOMES OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION
2 STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN ARCHITECTURE SCHOOLS
3 SURVEY OF U OF A DEPARTMENTS CONCERNING STUDENT DATA
4 SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
5 LONGITUDINAL STUDY PLAN
6 COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS: SPRING 1988

The following reports are in progress:

7 SENIOR STUDY
8 EEC TASK FORCE STUDY OF U OF A UNDERGRADUATES
9 EEC TASK FORCE STUDY OF U OF A ALUMNI
10 ALUMNI STUDY
11 ASSESSMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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